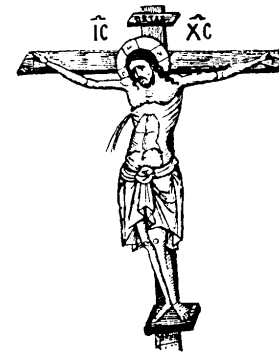


# THE CROSS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

by Father Ambroise Fontrier



**Holy Orthodox Metropolis of Boston**

1476 Centre Street  
Roslindale, Massachusetts 02131-1417  
Tel: 617.323.6379 - Fax: 617.323.3861  
Web Site: <http://www.homb.org>

**Holy Orthodox Metropolis of Boston**

man. All those who worship the wood of the Cross are delivered from the curse of Adam and receive the benediction and Grace of God to achieve all virtue.

For Christians, the Cross is a pride, a glory, a strength. All our strength comes from that of Christ crucified; our sin is put to death by the death of Christ on the Cross. Our elevation, our glory, are owed to the extreme humiliation of God Who is humiliated even unto dying with thieves and brigands.

What is there greater for a Christian than to become God through Grace? This is why Christians who believe in Christ sign themselves with the sign of the Cross—not carelessly, out of habit, or without thought, but with attention, intelligence, fear, trembling, reverence and piety.

The sign of the Cross shows the transformation of each man and his friendship with God. The demons fear the sign of the Cross and cannot stand to even see it traced in the air because they know that the Cross is the sign of friendship between mankind and God. Demons are apostates, the enemies of God. They are far removed from the Divine Face. They cannot approach those who have made peace with God, who have united with Him. The demons can no longer injure them.

If at times they tempt certain Christians—as everyone knows they do—it is those who do not understand as they should the sublime mystery of the Cross. For, those who know it, know from experience the strength and the power of the Cross against demons. The Cross gives the soul strength, power, intelligence, inspired wisdom and those who know the mystery of the Cross cry out in joy, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal. 6:14).

Therefore, the sign of the Cross being great and fearsome, it is every Christian’s duty to make the sign of the Cross with fear and trembling, with piety and attention, and not carelessly and foolishly, only out of habit or with distraction. Everyone receives strength and help from God according to the measure of piety he has for the Cross.

*Translated by Panagiota Liabotis  
from “La Lumiere du Thabor”, no. 20.*

## THE CROSS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

by Father Ambroise Fonzrier

In this day and age, where one is “infatuated” by everything that is “fashionable”, new schools of biblical thought tend to separate the Old Testament from the New. To these doctors who wish to be “in fashion” and “in the stream of things”, our response is that the Old Testament is like the New; both are the Book of Jesus Christ and His redeeming work.

From the beginning to the end of the Old Testament, the main subject is the coming of the Messiah, the Liberator of Israel and the Nations. “. . . He hath chosen us before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4).

The whole of the Old Testament was a vague image of the New. It was destined to disappear. It is again Paul the divine, the mouth of Christ, who says in his Epistle to the Hebrews that God, by declaring that He was going to build a New Covenant, “. . . hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8:13). Those therefore that think that the Old Testament has an independent existence are much mistaken. They should put themselves in the guidance of the School of the Holy Spirit and the Fathers and sing with us:

The shadow of the Law past away  
With the coming of Grace, O Virgin.  
As the Bush was burning but not consumed,  
A Virgin, thou gavest birth  
A Virgin, thou remained.  
Instead of the pillar of fire,  
The Sun of justice shone forth,  
And instead of Moses  
Christ, the Saviour of our souls.  
*(Theotokion of Saturday Vespers, Tone II)*

He who possesses spiritual eyes can easily see in the Old Testament the Light of the New which begins to break through. Behind all the events in the history of the Hebrew people, one can see the unfolding of Divine economy and hear the footsteps of the approaching Messiah.

The Patriarchs, the Prophets, the sacrifices, the religious figures of worship, announce the coming of the God-Man and yet, Christ

was not the only One about Whom prophesies were made. The people who would take part in the Divine-Human tragedy are equally prophesied: the Mother of God, John the Forerunner, the Apostles, the enemies of Jesus, and the sign of the Son of Man—the Cross.

The ecclesiastic year begins in September, the month in which we celebrate the universal exaltation of the Cross (Sept. 14). The Cross is prophesied about not only in the Old Testament but also, if one could say, by the New. It must appear, preceding the Saviour, the day of His Second and Glorious Coming. “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man, in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). The Prophet Isaiah says that “. . . and the government (kingdom) shall be upon His shoulders . . .” (Is. 9:5). The Kingdom is the Cross that the Saviour carried on His shoulders. The Kingdom is His power “. . . All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mat. 28:18).

The first mystical and mysterious sign of the Cross is hidden in the Paradise of Eden. In the celebrated heavenly valley where there was no sin, corruption, or death, man lived in the blessing and familiarity of God. Marvelous trees of all types were planted there. “And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food . . .” (Gen. 2:9). Among them stood two mysterious trees, two trees which were not strangers to the adversity, trials, and tribulations of our ancestors: the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen. 2:9).

This Tree of Life, from which man did not taste, is the first and oldest sign of the venerable Cross. There were many symbols regarding the Cross in the Old Testament, but none of them was as clear as that of the Tree of Life. You only have to glance at the theology of the Fathers and at the Hymnology of the Church to discover the close relationship between the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Cross. The Cross is characterized as “venerable”, as “sacred”, and overall as “Tree of Life”, “Life Giving Tree”, “Tree Holder of Life”, etc. These names proclaim that for the Church, the Cross is the new Tree of Life.

“If one were to ask me what was the most admirable thing that Christ did,” says St. John Chrysostom, “I would put aside the heaven, the earth, the sea, the Resurrection of the multitude of dead and

first to enter there. This theme is repeated every Sunday in the Beatitudes which we sing with their stichera in the Liturgy.

“By the Tree Adam was deceived, by the Tree of the Cross,  
You saved him once more,”

*(2nd Beatitude, Tone 6).*

“The fruit, beautiful to behold and good to eat, brought me  
death. But by tasting of Christ, the Tree of Life,  
I no longer die and with the thief I cry out:  
Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom.”

*(1st Beatitude, Tone 7).*

“By food the enemy led Adam out of Paradise.  
By the Cross, Christ brought the thief in again, crying:  
Remember me when Thou comest in Thy Kingdom”

*(1st Beatitude, Tone 1).*

In the person of Christ, human nature, immaculate and without guilt, enters into the perfect Beatitude at the right hand of God. In the person of the self-acknowledged thief, sinful human nature, but whose heart is well-disposed, enters liberated into the beatitude of Eden and eats from the Tree of Life.

In the person of the unrepentant thief, sinful and unrepenting nature, whose heart is ill-disposed, refuses to eat from the Tree of Life, refuses to participate in the Cross, in the fruit of the Cross, and falls to death. It is this teaching that is represented by the lower and diagonal branch of the Cross, which rises on the right towards heaven and descends on the left towards the abyss.

In Christ, we are given more than we received from Adam. The Economy of the Redemption in Christ is not merely a return to the paradisiacal state. It is something greater, more grandiose.

The Church is a new world, a new Paradise. In his commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, St. John Chrysostom says, “Christ does not make us well in the same proportion that Adam made us ill, . . . but much more . . . for the Apostle does not simply say ‘Grace’, but ‘a superabundance of Grace’ . . . Where sin abounded, Grace did much more abound”.

The Cross, says St. Symeon the New Theologian, is the altar on which was offered the fearsome sacrifice. It is on the Cross that the Son of God died because of the fall of mankind. Also, the Cross is venerated and symbolized as the sign of the universal redemption of

sat upon the throne said, Behold I make all things new. . .” (Rev. 21:5).

New Creation, Christ the second Adam, new Tree of Life: the Cross. This is why the Incarnation of Christ is a mystery more profound and greater than that of the creation of the world.

All the events in the Bible, especially those of the Divine Passion, are linked to events and things in Paradise. They are a repetition, a recapitulation, a clearing up, one could say, of the ancient acts of those who caused our fall from our first beauty into misery and death. There is a certain parallel.

Christ does not find fruit on the fig tree. This is because the first earthly Adam ate the fruit and used its leaves to hide his nudity. “. . . and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons” (Gen. 3:7). It is also in this context that one should put the mysterious episode of the withered fig tree of which the Evangelist Mark speaks (Mark 11:12-14) and which confounds the exegetes and makes those who mock smile. Isidore of Peluse speaks of a tradition received from the Fathers, according to whom the tree of transgression is the fig tree, whose leaves served the transgressors to cover their nudity.

At the time of the sin of the ancestors, the forbidden tree was not cursed. Christ cursed it later in His love for us so that it would no longer produce harmful and mortal fruit for His creation. Truly the mysteries of God are unfathomable!

Adam tasted of the forbidden tree and we were chased from Paradise; Christ fasted and we entered into spiritual Eden. By sinning, Adam lost the vestment of incorruptible glory woven by God; he remains nude and covered with shame. The Lord again covered the nakedness of our ancestor when He ascended the Cross. “All of you who have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ,” writes Saint Paul.

Our ancestors did not eat of the Fruit of the Tree of Life, but we, we eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ, fruits of His sacrifice, Eternal Life.

Adam, created on the sixth day, holds out his hand to receive the forbidden fruit. On the sixth day and at the sixth hour (Friday), Christ holds out His hands on the Cross to save us.

In the middle of the new spiritual Paradise rises the Cross, the Tree of Life. The first flower is the self-acknowledged thief. He is the

all the other miracles, and I would display only the Cross which is the most glorious of all. . . “

If in the image of the Tree of Life and in that of the Tree of the Cross, we see only the obvious, that is to say, a tree and a collection of wood; even if we see a sacred symbol, the relationship between the image and that which is represented will be trivial. However, if we are to quench our thirst at the source of Church dogmas, if we examine the teachings of this authentic exegete of Scripture, which is the Church, and what She says about the purpose of the Tree of Life, and afterwards, if we turn our spiritual eyes to the Cross, we will then see it as the sacrifice of the New Adam, of Jesus the God-Man, the only One without sin, expiatory victim for the deliverance of all humanity from sin and from eternal death. By sacred mediation our eyes will open and we will understand that which was the Tree of Life before our fall from the height of our original beauty and also that which is the Cross after the Redemption.

God, says the Apostle Paul, loved us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Understand!—before the foundation of the world, God had in mind the deification of man. But man, seduced by the counsel of the serpent-devil, believed he could become God by his own initiative, by his own power, without the grace of his Creator. It is this Divine plan, of the deification of man, which served as the argument for the Devil to fool our ancestors. “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall see as gods. . .” (Gen. 3:5).

In this way, man hastened to taste from that Tree of Knowledge which would make him equal to God even though he was not worthy to digest such nutrition. The result was the opposite. His eyes opened, says Scripture, He knew good and evil, he saw that he was naked, and he was afraid. “. . . And the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked . . . and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the Garden” (Gen. 3:7-8).

So that man would not live eternally in spiritual death—and this is another aspect of the mystery—God chased him from Paradise. “And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever;” (Gen. 3:22).

It is from compassion, forgiveness, and love that God allowed death and bodily dissolution in order that spiritual death, the result of the rupture in the link with the Source of Life, would not be eternal, as is the misfortune of nakedness, which is the absence of the Grace of God.

St. Basil the Great raises this mystery in the anaphora of his liturgy, “. . . in Thy just judgment, O God, Thou hast exiled him (Adam) from Paradise and placed him in this world; Thou has returned him to the earth from whence he was taken, all the while preparing him for salvation by rebirth in Thine Anointed One. For Thou didst not reject forever the creature which Thou hadst fashioned, O Good One, nor didst Thou forget the work of Thy hands. . .”

St. Cosmas the Melodius, the composer of the canon of the Exaltation of the Cross, sums up brilliantly this theology and in the troparion of the fifth ode, he also identifies the Tree of Life with the Cross:

It was on thee, O Tree memorable,  
That Christ was suspended.  
It is thee, O Cross, that the turning sword  
Which guarded Eden protected.  
Even the dread Cherubim fell back  
Before Christ Who was suspended on thee,  
Granting peace to our souls.

Man, unworthy of the Divine honour, was chased far from the Tree of Life, whose safekeeping was now placed in the hands of the cherubim and the turning sword. “So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the Garden of Eden, Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the Tree of Life” (Gen. 3:24).

The question, then, that is raised is this: if Adam, still without sin, could not eat from the Tree of Life, how would he be able to participate after the fall?

The Fathers divinely resolve the difficulty: God Who so loved His creation before it existed, Who wished freely to give man incorruptible Life, would send His only Son to open anew the door to the Tree of Life.

The Lord, having become Man, taught the eternal truths. But He was not content with only this because where would be the significance? What would man have gained by knowing eternal truths if he did not have in him Life Eternal, which is given only by the Tree of Life?

Bodily and spiritual death would have rendered the heavenly truths empty. However, the Bible, which has the Saviour come down from the heavens to earth, tells us that the Lord is not only the Truth, but He is also the Life. “. . . I am the Way and the Truth and the Life . . .” (Jn 14:6).

The death on the Cross and the Resurrection gave the Divine teaching all of its value. All the Economy of our redemption finds its climax in the mystery of the Cross. It is by the Cross that the Apostle Paul finds the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth of the mystery of God (Eph. 3:18).

The Cross and the Resurrection have purified man from sin and from the ancestral curse. From them we have become participants in Eternal Life. The Blood of Christ the God-Man, the fruit of the death on the Cross, nourishes us and grafts onto our aged trunk the new man, the son of immortality.

The new life, the beginning of future immortality, the new spiritual paradise, is the Church, the very Body of Christ. That which we should have received from the Tree of Life, from which we were originally deprived because of the transgression, we now receive freely from the Cross by the Grace of God in the Church and nowhere else because outside the Church there is no Eucharist.

The Tree of Life, the Cross, are not ordinary symbols, but a substantial and fundamental reality. Clement of Alexandria sees in the Cross, the Tree on which Christ, our Life, was hung, from which we eat the fruits of eternal Divine knowledge. The holy Fathers Cyril of Jerusalem and Photios of Constantinople see the whole earth as Paradise, in the center of which is planted the Cross, the new Tree of Life, just as the old one was planted in the beginning in the center of Paradise. By the new Tree, the earth, in the past cursed, is now full of blessings and has become Paradise.

For the Apostle Paul, who has risen to the third heaven, the new reality is the Church, which appeared in this world by the Incarnation. She is the new Creation, the New Man. “And He that